

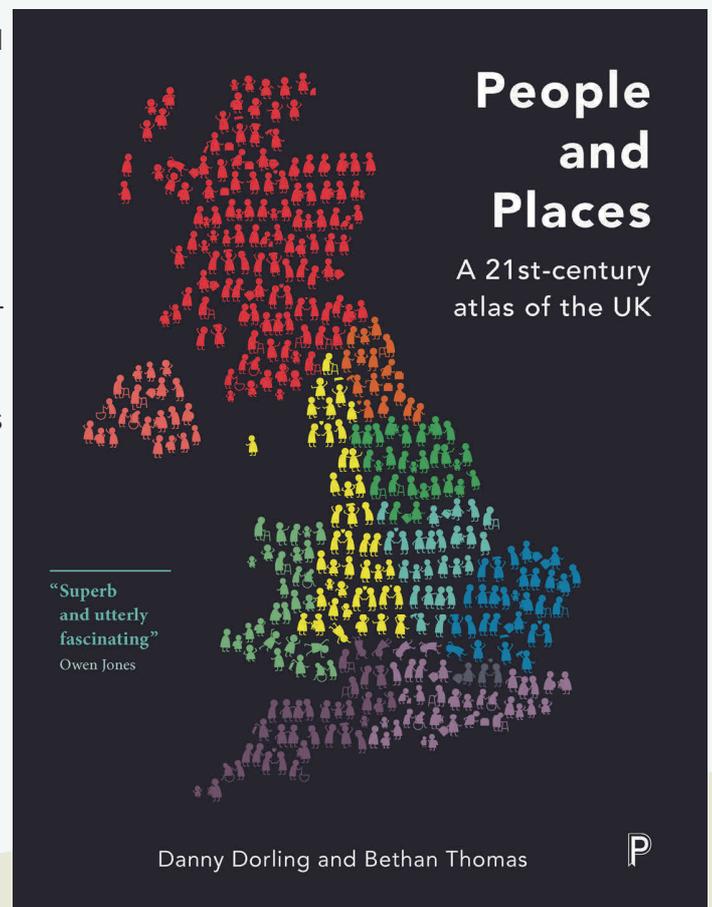
Book Review: *People and places* by Danny Dorling and Bethan Thomas

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Census lovers and ‘cartophiles’ will have eagerly awaited the latest edition of *People and Places*, a valuable contribution to the growing collection of atlases exploring the changing landscapes of society through the ever-popular cartogram. The increasing familiarity of cartograms (thanks in no small part to the authors themselves) negates the need for any lengthy discussion of their interpretation. In fact, a short comment in the introduction reminding readers that “all you need to know is that they are topologically correct... everywhere districts touch where they should and nowhere that they shouldn’t” (Dorling and Thomas, 2016: 6) is the only real aid to interpretation the authors offer. This assumption of understanding may be a little overstated, so for the more forgetful amongst us it is worth reiterating that the key difference between traditional maps and contemporary cartograms is the method of scaling. In cartograms, areas are scaled according to the population or attribute of the population mapped rather than the size of the areas themselves as in traditional maps. Despite this overstated assumption (and the wariness it might instil in a reader new to cartograms), the following pages more than compensate. The book is a riot of colourful graphics and figures, accompanied by clear commentary. I’ll mention some of the more intriguing insights into contemporary society shortly, but first the introduction.

This book is one to be dipped into, to be explored as and when the mood takes you, perhaps in no specific order and simply reflecting your current moods and interests. Notwithstanding, the introduction provides important context, not only to the society mapped but also through a potted history of the census, mapping techniques, the atlas itself and the added interest of a little history on the authors themselves. This chapter is essential preliminary reading but the following chapters can then be taken at a more meandering pace. My one suggestion (or request) to the authors and publishers at this stage would be a pull out set of the introductory maps. In these opening pages Dorling and Thomas explore (changing) population density, population potential (a simple measure of how near you are to everyone else), and the changing distributions of poverty, wealth and riches in the population, as well as those who fall somewhere in the middle. As I read on I flicked back to these pages repeatedly, intrigued by my own comparisons between the distribution of changing unemployment rates (p121), lack of qualifications (p135) or real estate activities (p159) and the distribution of wealth (p24) or the average population (p20). I am sure others will make similar comparisons.



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Having introduced the society being mapped, Dorling and Thomas then explore sex, age and marriage; religion and ethnicity; birthplace and nationality; qualifications and employment; occupation and industry; families, caring and health; and finally, homes and commuting. The full range of census topics. Each page boasts two cartograms depicting rates of the attribute mapped and where possible, change between 2001 and 2011. Rates are mapped as a proportion of the entire Local Authority district population. For example, the rate of students describes the number of students for every 100 people living in each place. Denominator populations might normally be restricted, for example using the working age population to calculate unemployment rates. However, by using the entire population as the denominator it is possible to compare the different rates calculated. This method also simplifies analysing change over time. These cartograms are then accompanied by various graphs, sometimes providing more temporal detail while still others provide more background information.

The commentary supporting each of the figures is a key highlight of this atlas. While census data is increasingly mapped at various scales, these maps are often produced in isolation from discussion. Dorling and Thomas' narrative helps the reader navigate the changing landscape of society effectively, highlighting interesting points and emphasising those areas which have seen the most change or continuity.

For example, I was interested to discover that the increase in the population aged 25-29 between 2001 and 2011 is solely attributed to immigration (p37): unsurprisingly, this age group is concentrated in London whose boroughs (Newham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets) also saw some of the largest increases. The distribution of the population by age is relevant to many other themes of the book, education, certain types of occupation, and the provision of unpaid care. For example, areas with higher proportions of elderly people, away from the cities of London, Birmingham or Manchester, have some of the highest rates of unpaid care (p182). These areas are also often characterised by poorer service provision. It is in these commentaries, particularly those introducing each chapter, in which the policy relevance and political importance of this book shines. The maps drawn by Dorling and Thomas illustrate political neglect or areas of need while their commentary highlights key issues such as the need to meet the housing demands of a changing and ageing population.

The atlas concludes with a look back to the authors' previous edition and their classification of the human geography of the UK: London and the Archipelago — a country within which success or prosperity is determined by proximity to London. Dorling and Thomas assesses the state of the North/South divide today, looking at the geography of a number of telling variables such as age, occupations in finance and insurance, average annual income of pensioners and rooms per person. Importantly, these geographies are changing, but not necessarily as we would like. While some gaps or divides are narrowing, London appears to be cleaving apart. The ability to identify this change is a valuable thing for demographers, politicians and the public — this book is a testament to the value and need of the census. A book for the coffee table, the office, the journalist's desk and the University library, this is certainly well worth a read.